

“With me, you have to give your all!”

For Nikolaus Harnoncourt one thing is clear: if you lead other people, not only do you have to be authoritative and persuasive, but you must put your whole energy into your work and understand what the others are doing.

AS TOLD TO MICHAEL MERZ, PHOTOS BY DUKAS

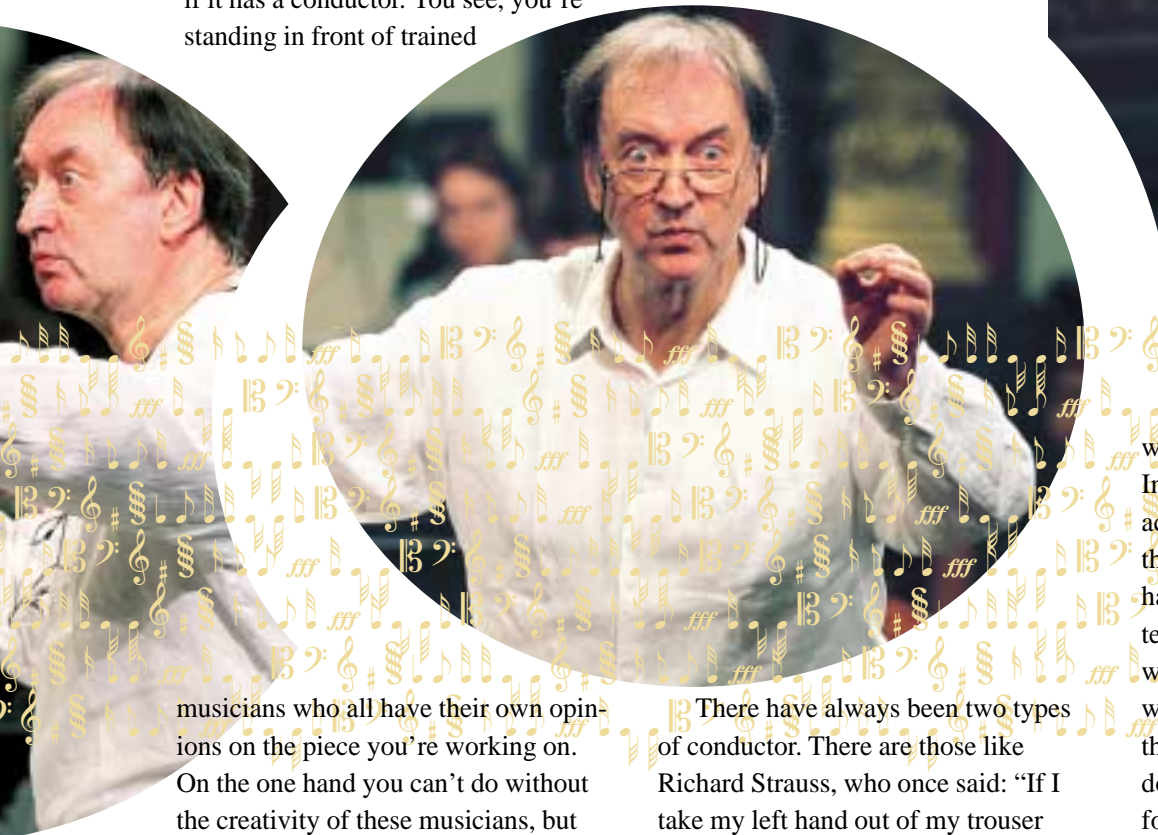


You can learn how to beat the different time signatures with your baton – it takes about an hour.

What you can't learn is what conducting is really all about. That's why there have always been so many self-taught people in my profession.

This may be the only profession remaining from a bygone era of authoritarianism. An orchestra only functions if it has a conductor. You see, you're standing in front of trained

reason anyone who chooses this profession should also have mastered an instrument. You have to be able to set air in motion to make sounds. Naturally it helps if you have charisma, can make nice movements, and have a convincing idea of what you're doing. But you also have to understand what the musicians have to do with their instruments.



musicians who all have their own opinions on the piece you're working on. On the one hand you can't do without the creativity of these musicians, but on the other you have to get them to do what you want! Since it's impossible to channel all these different opinions, there comes a moment where I have to say: "We're doing it this way, and no other!"

What sort of a musician is it who doesn't make music himself, but makes other people make music by waving his arms around? There's almost something perverse about it! For this

There have always been two types of conductor. There are those like Richard Strauss, who once said: "If I take my left hand out of my trouser pocket, that's as wild as it gets!" And then there are people like Leonard Bernstein who are drenched in sweat after only five minutes on the podium. Take me, for example. When I'm speaking I never raise my voice. But



when I work, I shout! With my body! In doing so I'm taking a view which is actually very antisocial. I always say to the musicians: "With me, you really have to give your all!" The musicians tell me that all the other conductors want that too, but if they gave their all with everyone they'd have to retire at thirty! To this I can only reply: "I really don't care if you have any energy left for my successor!" My view is that you won't live a day longer if you conserve your energy: it just means you won't get as good!

MICHAEL MERZ IS A FREELANCE JOURNALIST. HE WRITES ON THE ARTS AND COOKING FOR SWISS AND INTERNATIONAL PUBLICATIONS.

Nikolaus Harnoncourt (now 71) joined the Vienna Symphony Orchestra in 1952 after training as a cellist. In 1953 he founded "Concentus Musicus", an ensemble which interprets early music using authentic instruments. In 1975 Harnoncourt conducted the Zurich Monteverdi Cycle. Nowadays he conducts the Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonic, and the orchestra of the Zurich opera house.

PUBLICATIONS AND RECORDINGS:
Nikolaus Harnoncourt: "Baroque Music Today: Music As Speech" and "The Musical Dialogue"
Nikolaus Harnoncourt records exclusively for the TELDEC label.
Major CD recordings: The Monteverdi operas: Orfeo/Il ritorno di Ulisse in patria/Incoronazione di Poppea
Mozart: Zauberflöte